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ABSTRACT

This study compared immediate, short-term effects of different training components on mothers' acquisition of non-directive play skills. Subjects were dyads of 49 mothers and their sons, ages 4 to 6. Mother-son pairs were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. The control group received no training. All other mothers viewed the videotape "How to play with a child." In the Modeling condition, trainers answered questions following the videotape. In the Rehearsal condition, mothers watched the video then practiced play skills and received feedback on skill execution. Mothers in the Processing condition watched the video, practiced play, received feedback, then discussed their cognitive and emotional reactions. Mothers in all four conditions practiced playing with their sons once a week for 2 weeks, then returned for a post-training assessment. Prior to training and again 2 weeks later, the mother-son dyads participated in a 10-minute videotaped play session in which mothers followed their son's lead. Results indicated that children whose mothers received no training were actually more directive in their play than children whose mothers received video-modeling only. However, when video-modeling was supplemented with skill rehearsal and the processing of skill usage, significant gains were noted in mothers' non-directiveness, self-reported skill implementation, and self-perceived positive affect during play. (MM)

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TRAINING MOTHERS IN THE CHILD'S GAME: A COMPARISON OF METHODS

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Abstract

Immediate, short-term effects of different training components on mothers' acquisition of non-directive play skills were compared. Subjects included 49 mother-son dyads. Each dyad was assigned to one of four conditions: no training control; video-modeling; video-modeling plus skill rehearsal; video-modeling, skill rehearsal, plus cognitive and emotional processing of play skill usage. Dyadic play interactions in which mothers were instructed to follow their child's lead were conducted pre- and posttraining. Results indicated that children whose mothers received no training were actually more directive in their play than children whose mothers received video-modeling only. However, when video-modeling was supplemented with skill rehearsal and the processing of skill usage, significant gains were noted with respect to mothers' non-directiveness, self-reported skill implementation, and self-perceived positive affect during play.

TRAINING MOTHERS IN THE CHILD'S GAME: A COMPARISON OF METHODS

Parent training as a treatment for families of conduct problem children typically includes a component whereby parents are asked to follow their child's lead during play. This phase of training is often referred to as the child's game. Parent-child play that is marked by positive affect and the granting of autonomy is thought to be an important step in breaking the cycle of coercive interchanges that characterize these families. Programs differ, however, in the emphasis placed on such play. Some training programs devote only 1-2 sessions to play skill acquisition (Webster-Stratton, 1987), whereas other programs make child-directed play a focus in virtually every session (Guerney, 1983). Research focusing specifically on parents' acquisition of play skills is lacking even though child-directed play is rated by mothers as one of the more difficult parenting techniques (Webster-Stratton, 1989).

The purpose of the this study was to compare three different approaches to teaching non-directive play skills to mothers of boys ages 4-6 years.

Method

Subjects

Forty-nine mothers of non-referred boys (ages 4-6 years) were randomly assigned to one of four conditions.

Conditions

The four conditions included a no-training, control condition (C) as well as three training conditions: video-modeling (M), video-modeling plus skill rehearsal (R), or video-modeling and skill rehearsal plus cognitive and emotional processing of skill usage (P). In each training condition, mothers viewed Webster-Stratton's (1987) 36-minute videotape, "How to play with a child." In the Modeling condition trainers answered questions and distributed handouts corresponding to the videotape. Mothers in the

Rehearsal condition watched the videotape and were then given the additional opportunity to practice the play skills and receive feedback on their skill execution. Mothers in the Processing condition watched the videotape, practiced the play, received feedback on skill execution, and then processed with the trainer their cognitive and emotional reactions to play. Training lasted approximately one hour.

Procedures

Mothers in all four conditions were asked to practice playing with their sons once a week (15-minutes) for two weeks until they returned to the clinic for a post-training assessment. Prior to training and then again two weeks later, the dyads participated in a 10-minute play session in which mothers were told to follow their son's lead. All play sessions were videotaped.

Measures

Judges viewed the videotapes and rated both maternal and child control and positive affect. Mothers also rated their own and their son's affect during play. Mothers in the three training conditions also rated home use of play skills in terms of implementation, usefulness, and difficulty.

Results

Planned comparisons were conducted on all post-training variables after controlling for pre-training scores and mothers' report of conduct problems on the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (Eyberg & Ross, 1978). See table 1 for adjusted means by condition and t values for each planned comparison.

Control vs Modeling

Children in the control condition were significantly more directive than children in the Modeling condition, despite the fact that mothers in this condition had received no training in the use of child-centered, nondirective play skills.

Modeling vs Rehearsal and Processing

Mothers in the modeling only condition were significantly more controlling of their children in play than mothers in the other two training conditions. Mothers in the modeling condition also reported less success at implementing these play skills in the home than mothers in the other two training conditions.

Rehearsal vs Processing

Children whose mothers were in the Rehearsal condition were significantly less directive of during play than children whose mothers had processed their newly acquired skills. Mothers in the Processing condition also reported more positive affect during play and a greater success at implementing home play than mothers in the Rehearsal condition.

Discussion

The pattern of findings suggests that mothers gain little in terms of skill acquisition from simply viewing a videotape model of child-directed play skills. Skill rehearsal and the cognitive and emotional processing of mothers' attempts at play appear to be important, additional training components. Furthermore, the Processing component appears to boost mothers' confidence in their play, as they perceive that they are able to satisfactorily implement the play skills and they experience more positive emotions when playing. Although further research is needed before these results can be generalized to conduct problem children and their mothers, our data would suggest that modeling the skills needed for the Child's Game is insufficient.

Table 1

Adjusted Means and t Values for Planned Comparisons

	Adjusted Means				Planned Comparison - T Values		
	C	M	R	P	C vs M	M vs R/P	R vs P
Observational Ratings							
Maternal Control	4.27	4.20	3.44	2.85	0.31	2.10*	0.71
Child Control	5.21	4.30	4.53	5.67	3.17**	-1.55	-1.76*
Maternal Affect	4.80	4.95	5.05	5.12	-0.45	-0.01	0.13
Child Affect	5.47	5.25	5.58	5.62	0.75	-1.00	-0.08
Mothers' Ratings							
Maternal Affect	5.93	5.96	5.90	6.32	0.71	-0.74	-2.10*
Child Affect	6.26	6.24	6.26	6.49	0.93	-0.74	-1.03

Table 1 (cont.)

Adjusted Means and t Values for Planned Comparisons

	Adjusted Means				Planned Comparisons		
	C	M	R	P	C vs M	M vs R/P	R vs P
Satisfaction Ratings							
Implementation	----	5.10	5.56	6.23	----	-2.80**	-2.37**
Utility	----	5.83	5.81	6.14	----	-0.39	-0.70
Difficulty	----	5.91	5.69	6.16	----	-0.01	-1.00

Note. C = Control condition; M = Modeling; R = Rehearsal; P = Processing.

Control scores reflect level of control displayed. Affect scores reflect level of positive affect.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

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